

October 1, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC -U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24) testified in front of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health today in support of his legislation, H.R. 3441, which would automatically enroll veterans already eligible for free 5-year health care in the VA medical system within 45 days of leaving the Armed Services. Arcuri authored the legislation after the idea was raised by members of his Veterans Advisory Committee during their regular meetings throughout the 24th Congressional District.

"This legislation will ensure that acceptance into the VA healthcare system is as simple and effortless as possible for the tens of thousands who will likely seek access in the coming months," **Arcuri said**. "Unfortunately, we still have a system that places enrollment responsibility fully on a soldier who has just returned from war and are already dealing with the adjustment process. We shouldn't place another burden on our veterans by requiring them to actively pursue the care they may want or need and this legislation will relieve them of this burden."

"As servicemembers begin to surge home from Iraq, and the conflict in Afghanistan continues, it is imperative that they are able to come home to a health care system that provides the critical care they need and deserve," **Tom Tarantino, IAVA, Legislative Associate said**. "It is currently the veteran's responsibility to initiate and complete the application and registration process for VA healthcare. This is unacceptable. The process is often daunting, time consuming and confusing. IAVA believe that our warriors deserve the best care and services that the country can provide. We are proud to offer our assistance to Congressman Arcuri with this meaningful legislation."

"We have long favored and encouraged legislation of this type," **said Barry Searle, Director of The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division**.

"Congressman Arcuri's excellent bill reinforces the need for all service branches and the Department of Defense in general to coordinate and standardize electronic records for transfer to the VA. This 'seamless transition' practice will insure that well deserved benefits are properly provided from 'day of enlistment to inheritance by survivors' -- as they should be."

H.R. 3411 does the following:

- Automatically enrolls veterans who are already eligible for free VA health care: those veterans who served in a combat theater of operations after November 11, 1998;
- Requires the Defense Department and Department of Veterans Affairs to work together to most effectively achieve a seamless transition for returning soldiers;
- Issues a standard VA veterans' identification card (VIC) to enrolled veterans and provides a listing of VA medical facilities within 100 miles of the veteran, as well as a description of federal veterans benefits and programs (educational benefits, job training, and placement programs) for which the veteran may be eligible; and,
- Provides two opt-out opportunities - one at the time of separation, and another 6 months after separation - if the veteran prefers another form of health coverage in order to preserve an individual's right to choose his/her health plan.

H.R. 3411 has been endorsed by the American Legion and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), and has the support of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Bob Filner.

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